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CIA Denies Secretly Aiding Insurgent Forces in Angola

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The CIA yesterday denied a Newsweek report that it is secretly aiding insurgent military forces in Angola, an action that would violate a 1976 law prohibiting such assistance.

"We obey the law, we do not violate the law," CIA spokesman Dale Peterson said in response to questions about the report. He denied Newsweek's statement that "training, arms and financial assistance" are being given by the CIA to military forces in Angola.

Undercover aid to Angolan rebels, such as the UNITA guerrilla movement headed by Jonas Savimbi, would appear to undercut U.S. diplomatic efforts as well as to violate the law.

The Reagan administration has been attempting to persuade the Angolan government to send home Cuban troops in that country as part of a regional settlement in southern Africa, including the parallel withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia.

According to administration sources, increasing military pressure by the guerrillas is among the reasons why the Angolan government so far has been unwilling to accede to the U.S. request.

The tightly drawn 1976 law, known as the Clark amendment, prohibits assistance of any kind—direct or indirect—that has the purpose or effect of helping anyone or any group to conduct military or paramilitary operations in Angola. The Reagan administration sought repeal of the Clark amendment in 1981, but Congress refused.

Newsweek's long article, the cover story of its current issue, said that under the Reagan administration the CIA "is back in the business of covert action—with a global scope and an intensity of resources unmatched since its heyday 20 years ago."

The magazine said the administration has presented to congressional intelligence committees official justifications or "findings" to back up 12 to 14 covert operations in various parts of the world, seven or eight of them considered "major" covert actions. The number of covert operatives at CIA has increased to more than 1,000 from a low of "perhaps 300" in the Carter administration, the magazine said.

Among the actions described or listed by Newsweek were support of Iranian exile groups seeking to overthrow Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran, operations aimed at Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Libya, and aid to military forces in Ethiopia and Sudan.

The magazine said the CIA is "working with the Chinese to supply arms to the forces of former Cambodian ruler Pol Pot," who is head of the Khmer Rouge forces. The State Department told a House subcommittee Sept. 15 that "we do not provide aid of any kind or have any contact with the Khmer Rouge." State Department spokesman Alan Romberg said yesterday that the Sept. 15 statement represents administration policy. The CIA declined to comment.